

# Destiny Squeaks

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Rat adjusted his spectacles and flipped the pages over and over. This was really a windfall. Since clean-up week last year he had found only scraps of news. True there were newspapers, but they were concerned mostly with local news, and they were quite often gathered up by the garbage collector before Rat had had time to read them. When accounts of national or international events of momentous significance to Ratdom were printed, they occasionally were found by Rat; but as likely as not the succeeding issues could not be found anywhere along the entire alley. At times too, when Rat, by searching diligently among wrapped up potato peelings, found a long awaited account in a really good newspaper, he was unable to read it all at once—at least not in safety. He had enjoyed a long and useful life by being careful, and for that reason his opportunities for keeping up with the news were somewhat limited. But here in this tall stack was a mine of information, a wealth of thought. Dawn had barely broken; so, if he hurried, Rat could read the most important articles before Man began to move about. He could fit together into a comprehensible pattern the scraps of information he had gathered during the year and also fill in a background against which to set the information he would find in the coming year. Information which he would get only in small bits and pieces, but to which Man had free and continuous access. If Man did not have this advantage, things might be different. Somewhere he had read that in relation to the total period during which life has existed on earth, the supremacy of Man was a mere flash in the pan. Rat's beady eyes hunted through the index of the next magazine. Who could

know? Ratdom might still come into its own. *International News*, page forty-one. Here was the shortest route to the most important events. What was this? Czechoslovakia in the news again? He always watched for news from this country; it was a crossroad of something. Conquerors were quite likely to put in an appearance here; and, whether it was a variation of Man wielding warlike weapons or some variation of Rat bearing disease and death, events in that area had historically signalled the march of significant change. This article was an account of the same old play by Man on the same old stage. World reaction about the same too. Mongol barbarian, Teutonic barbarian—what difference did it make? Hitler, Stalin; Rat held his foot over his mouth to stop a yawn. The repetition was stale; same thing played in other little theatres nearby—Tito and Mihailovitch. It was during clean-up week at least two years ago that Rat found both magazines, the one extolling Mihailovitch as the true leader of his country, the saviour of members of the United States Air Force, the hero of the western democracies—and the other magazine deep down in the pile splashed with mud which told of the execution of Mihailovitch. Mihailovitch, the same hero of democracy—*democracy*, the word was a little strange to Rat. Where had he heard it recently? Oh, yes! The radio was blaring one Sunday evening about "making democracy live." Mihailovitch did not live, and nothing whatever was done about it. Rat ran his toes through his whiskers. Democracy was getting careless with her heroes.

He reached for another *Newsmagazine*. This was really an old one with stories



about Chinese fighting each other as they had been since before Rat's grandfather had been born. There seemed to be a new angle now: the Chinese agrarians, red agrarians, were now simply referred to as communists. Rat wiped his spectacles; yes, there it was without trimmings, *communists*. Always before they referred to themselves as agrarians or leftists. Rat yawned again at the memory. That had been old stuff; when he was young, there were already jokes about parlor pinks. There still were. Last week he had breakfasted on some green salad leftovers wrapped in newspaper. Though it was badly smeared with the salad the article was still legible. It quoted a young European lecturer who had said that all intellectuals (when he read "intellectuals," Rat squinted and moved his head from side to side twice instead of once) in France were leftists, not communists, just leftists. Rat had chewed a piece of green cucumber with relish. Even he knew that for years Thorez and Duclos had been in bed with La Belle France herself.

The vague morning mist was disappearing under the bright rays of the sun, and Rat knew that he must hurry. The next magazine had news of another atom bomb test. Atom bomb factories, cyclotrons, neutrons were all a little beyond Rat's comprehension. The general picture was interesting though; it might even be the thing for which he constantly watched. His scraps of information over the last three years had repeatedly pointed to some new development that hinted at destruction of the present order. He had noticed for a while that Man considered underground factories, decentralization of cities; but lately he seemed to have forgotten; he surely was not doing much about it. Man's political memory was short. First Mihailovitch and now defense against the bomb. Rat threw the magazine aside; he didn't

like the idea of decentralization either. Rat would follow Man, and so would have to live in the ground like his country cousin, the field mouse. In the ground, no lovely warehouses, no crowded, stuffed buildings, but in the ground. No! Wait! Not *in* the ground; but *underground*. Rat's little brain began to click. The pattern, the pieces—everything was fitting together. They were not all there; some of the pieces were still missing. Rat seized the next magazine. Nobody but Wallace on the cover. From atom bomb to Wallace; from invention of a new weapon to invention of a new political idea. A doubt entered Rat's cunning brain; was the idea so new? He read more furiously than ever. The news from Berlin was wonderful: armed American guards on trains running in armed Russian zones, Russia about to take over the German capital. For some reason Rat recalled the enormous headline he had seen once early in World War II, about a pact between Hitler and Stalin, the implications of which had never been fully explained to most of Man's kind. By the size of the headlines Rat knew that some guessed its import, and in his own heart had flared a diabolical hope. Now even though it was a time of peace, the news seemed more complex than in wartime.

The biggest puzzles to Rat were the newer magazines, each of which contained something about Italy. Time was getting short so that he had to resort to a mere spot check of important articles. Here was one about what per cent of the vote was given to each party in the last election in Italy; the article seemed right to Rat; but in another magazine farther down there was news that democracy and freedom had won. Rat read a little more closely. There was a small item about money spent before election; and buried in a paragraph in the back of that issue was the story of some solid,

quiet and effective work by a militant church.

Rat was not sure he liked the news about Italy, but he picked up one of the magazines he had skipped in his hurry. This was more like he expected. Now he was recognizing the pattern again. Bogota. Rat saw it all, he thought. While the democracies were busy in Russia's continent, she had been busy in theirs. Playing in each other's back yard, were they? This was fine, just fine. Rat licked his lips and hurried on. The Finnish treaty, bases in Greenland, a collision in the air in the

Arctic regions. In his haste his claws cut deep slashes in the pages. Russian air power, American production, air mileage from Bogota to Panama, Los Alamos might.

The brilliant and revealing rays of the sun fell on Rat surrounded by torn and bruised pages of history. Quiet and still, he studied the wreckage intently, and his tail twitched spasmodically like that of a cat watching a bird almost within reach. He was already rehearsing the speech he would make at noon today, underground, of course, in Rat Hall by the River: "Young Rats, organize! The time has come—."

### TIME! TIME!

Time! Time!

Fleeting stuff of life.

Purest

gold,

Vainest

dross.

Each bit of you

becomes my loss

And of this loss

eternity is

made.

—ANNE McDONNELL